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Who should go in the Case Weitnauer?

THE Federal Department for Foreign Affairs has, on the whole, had a bad press ever since Mr Pierre Aubert became its chief some two years ago. It has recently been prominently in the news again, but this time with an affair which is widely considered a scandal.

It is no secret that Pierre Aubert, who is a member of the Social Democratic party, has planted a number of partisans inside the Swiss foreign service and has thus changed the whole style of the hitherto staid diplomatic service.

However, the second man in command, Secretary of State Albert Weitnauer — formerly a highly successful international negotiator on behalf of the Confederation and in the Seventies an equally successful Swiss Ambassador in London — is the personification of the professional diplomat of the old school: discreet, well groomed and mannered, well informed and generally a figure straight out of a textbook on old-world diplomacy.

It is, in view of differences in style and conception, perhaps not surprising that frictions arose. But the method by which certain diplomats in the department decided to fight the Secretary of State and, if possible, to rid the department of him, were distinctly aimed below the belt.



Pierre Aubert



Albert Weitnauer

By Gottfried Keller

They found willing journalists who launched a story in a popular illustrated publication, with a huge headline, to the effect that Secretary of State Weitnauer had, on his own and without authority of the Federal Council, told the Americans that Switzerland was prepared to offer asylum to Iran's ex-Shah.

There was, as investigations have proved, not a word of truth in this — but a lot of damage was done.

The Federal Council then had to deal with a proposal from its member Aubert to the effect that State Secretary Weitnauer should — after 40 years of distinguished service — be

pensioned off nine months prior to the due date of his retirement.

And this is what the Federal Council, having deliberated no fewer than three times over this proposal, has in fact decided.

Thus a man whom many Swiss in Britain remember, a man who has rendered the Confederation enormous services during four decades, is now being seen off prematurely because his immediate political chief thinks he cannot get on with him.

The decision to send Dr. Weitnauer prematurely into the wilderness does not speak favourably for Foreign Minister Aubert, nor for the Federal Council as a whole.

Switzerland now has a "Case Aubert" rather than a "Case Weitnauer", and in view of the fact that Federal Councillors cannot be dismissed more than one newspaper has hinted that it would now be up to Pierre Aubert to draw the consequence and go.

An open letter to Oscar Boehringer

My dear Oscar,

The reasons are many why I take up my pen today. Uppermost is gratitude to the Boehringer Family for creating a paper for the Swiss community in Britain and for carrying it for 61 years.

Nobody who has not been close to the making of the Swiss Observer — first every week, then every fortnight and now every month — can even imagine what that has meant.

Since I started writing for the paper in 1932, edited it for seven and a half years in the Sixties, was on the advisory council until last year, and had the privilege of knowing your father and mother and having you and your wife Ildé as friends, I feel I need give no more reasons for writing this letter.

And yet there is one other

very valid one: It was in 1916 that the first group abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique in Switzerland was founded in London. Three years later your father created the Swiss Observer, and the NSH's hitherto full-time secretary, Prof. Arnold Laett, became its first editor.

The society which I have the honour of presiding has all along been close to the paper, and so I feel this, too, adds weight to my message. Therefore I think it is not presumptuous if I express thanks today on behalf of many.

You told me once how impressed you had always been by the devotion to the paper by your father. Even when he was ill he took a personal interest in it and helped with proof-correcting and other work on his sick-bed

(during the war, the editor was also engaged in work at the Special Division of the Swiss Embassy). And that is why you became his worthy successor.

All these years you have carried the burden. You have offered an office, first in the old church turned printing works at 23 Leonard Street and later in your other building next door. You have provided not only a home, but also heating, lighting, telephone and ever more clerical help completely free of charge when the paper was making no money and at a small token sum only when things looked up.

You have written letters, smoothed out matters which the editors had ruffled, you even did administrative work to help out, and you have been hon. secretary to the council. Above all,

you have carried the responsibility.

Readers of the Swiss Observer have always been quick to criticise, but few have fully realised your devoted presence behind the production of the colony news organ, nor have they understood the nature of your unselfish deed.

Personally I have always appreciated your fairness, your courtesy, your sense of humour, the way you carried disappointments with equanimity, and I value all the technical know-how and professional skills you and your staff passed on to me after I took over the editorship in 1962.

I cannot deny that in my feelings at this moment there is an ingredient of nostalgia that